DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 205 RE 001 294

By- Jan-Tausch, Evelyn

Discovery and Measurement of Interests in Reading.

Pub Date Apr 68

Note- 14p.; Paper presented at International Reading Association conference, Boston, Mass., April 24-27, 1968.

EDRS Price MF -$0.25 HC -$0.80

Descriptors-Evaluation Methods, *Interests, Interest Scales, *Interest Tests, Literature, *Reading Interests, *Student Interests

The development of an instrument to assess the reading interests of individual children is described. The instrument devised consists of 36 illustrations judged to involved 12 themes. It was assumed that a student's selection of certain preferred illustrations would be an expression of his identification with the major thematic content of the picture. To evaluate these Thematic-Content Illustrations as a means of determining individual interests, the selections made on three instruments by 100 seventh-grade pupils, 50 girls and 50 boys, were compared. Student's choices of illustrations and their selections from 48 fictitious titles and summaries which the investigator created to fit the 12 thematic categories and from a published "Literature Sampler" are reported. References are included. (RJ)

ED026205

INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
BOSTON, APRIL 24-27, 1968

Evelyn Jan-Tausch
Coordinator of Reading
Glen Ridge Public Schools
10 High Street
Glen Ridge, New Jersey

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"DISCOVERY AND MEASUREMENT OF INTERESTS IN READING"

Session 16 C - - The Role of Literature

RE001 294

A premise basic to current reading instruction is the widely-accepted dictum that reading material must engage the student's interest if the instruction is to be successful. The idea is by no means a new one.

An early theory of educational training based upon interest was formulated by Johann Frederick Herbart. Herbart thought that the purpose of education was to stimulate the spontaneous interest forces in the individual by directing him toward numerous and varied objects. It remained, however, for John Dewey to expound a theory of interest and activity that has been variously interpreted and misinterpreted by teachers, administrators, and lay public ever since.

Dewey defined interest in these terms: "Interests are varied . . . But in spite of this diversity, interests are one in principle. They all mark an identification in action, and hence in desire, effort and thought, of self with objects." (2) For Dewey, "self and interest are but two names for the same fact." (3)

In 1931 Douglas Fryer (4) surveying the high spots of the previous ten years of research by investigators concerned with both the theoretical significance and the clinical application of interest measurement, concluded that interests stood out as a separate unit of psychological activity distinct from other units as abilities, emotions, and motivations.

Research studies attempting to assess children's interests have, generally, utilized one of four methods:

1. By <u>expression</u> i.e. by a verbal statement of interest in an activity, subject, object, or occupation.
2. By <u>manifestation</u> i.e. by activities or actions in which observable behavior reveals attraction to or repulsion from a subject, occupation, or the like.
3. By <u>tests</u> i.e. by means of attention, memory, and in one case, by means of vocabulary (the Michigan Vocabulary Profile Test).
4. By <u>inventories</u> i.e. by means of the statistical treatment of a large number of statements of preferences in order to obtain a series of scores revealing relative interest in various occupations or fields of activity. (6)

The two educational areas most frequently employing one or the other of these methods of determining interests have been those of guidance counseling and reading instruction. Where the emphasis in guidance has

been directed toward individual vocational choices, the general pattern of reading research, however, has tended toward revealing group choices of reading materials based on interests of boys, girls, age levels, ability levels, etc.

In 1941 Robert Thorndike (9), summarizing the results of two decades of studies dealing with the reading interests of groups of children at different intelligence levels, made the following generalizations:

1. If books are classified into types according to subjects, it is found that the most frequent choices of bright, average, and dull children fall in the same categories. In the upper elementary grades, adventure and mystery stories in the case of boys, and these, together with home and school stories in the case of girls, account for the largest fraction of choices at all levels of intelligence.
2. The reading of bright children, however, includes a wider range of titles, more science, biography, informational material, and a generally higher quality of material.
3. Very bright children are differentiated from average children less by the material they read than by the age at which they read it. Titles which are read by the average child of 11 or 12 are read by the very bright child at the age of 8 or 9.

The findings of all these studies, Thorndike pointed out, referred to choices based upon actual reading and represented, therefore, a

complex resultant of what was physically available to the child, what was written so that he could comprehend it, and what was in line with his interests. Thorndike questioned the influence of reading ability and past reading experience upon the choice of topics made by the children. His own study, designed to answer the question he raised, involved the use of an 88-item fictitious annotated titles questionnaire. Three thousand children completed the questionnaire.

Thorndike's conclusions as a result of his study were that:

1. Within the same sex, the interest patterns of groups differing by several years in age and/or as much as thirty points in average I.Q. show a substantial correlation.
2. In their pattern of reported reading interests, bright children (median I.Q. 123) are most like a group of mentally slower children (median I.Q. 92) who are two or three years older than they are.
3. Sex is conspicuously more important than age or intelligence as a determiner of reported interest pattern, at least within the range of age and ability here studied.
4. The acceleration of interest in bright children does not seem to be entirely or even predominantly a scholarly or bookish precocity.

Amatora and Edith (1) reporting in 1951 on a four year study of children's free reading interest in grades II through VIII found the adolescent boy preferred mystery and adventure to love stories. Both sexes revealed a preference for characters their own age. The titles

chosen indicated an interest of the readers in themselves and their personal problems.

A 1956 study by Vandament and Thalman (10) was designed to secure a more analytical view of the nature of children's reading interests by utilizing types of fantasy found in literature. Three types of fantasy were selected for study: social, aggressive, achievement. Responses were elicited from 1034 students in grades VI through X. The findings that girls preferred social types of reading and boys favored aggressive types, corresponded with those of Gesell and Ilg (5) to the effect that girls exhibit more social orientation than do boys. No significance was found when the preferences were analyzed in terms of socio-economic groups.

Supporting the findings of the Vandament studies, insofar as sex differences in reading interests are concerned, were the results of a study by Taylor and Schneider (8) in which responses were obtained from 5,477 Chicago children in grades V through VIII to questions regarding favorite book, favorite author, favorite kind of book, and an example by title. Boys' interests were found to remain about the same at each of the grade levels studied whereas the interests of girls in animals, family and school, make-believe and mystery decreased steadily while interest in teen-age and romance increased at a tremendous rate in the 7th and 8th grades.

In her 1961 study Stanchfield (7) used the personal conference method to interview 153 boys at the 4th, 6th, and 8th grade levels. Within each of these grade levels there were three sub-groupings; superior readers, average readers, and poor readers. Stanchfield

found no significant differences in the choices of the boys reading above grade level, at grade level, and below grade level. As for differences by grade levels, Stanchfield found ten out of the fifty categories of reading interest used revealed significantly different ratings. These differences appeared to Stanchfield to be in the expected direction of changes in tastes with increasing age and maturity. All of the boys interviewed showed an overwhelming preference for exciting, suspense-filled, dramatic stories with emotionally charged vocabulary. "Outdoor life" was the most highly preferred of all the fifty categories.

This necessarily limited resumé of studies done to discover reading interests of pupils over a period of thirty years indicates but a representative few that this writer had investigated up to 1963. Certain conclusion did seem, however, to be warranted.

1. It is evident that many investigations have been made to discover the group interests of children according to intelligence levels; age and grade groupings; sex, socio-economic, and nationality differences.
2. There has been a scarcity of studies designed to determine the basic interests of the individual child and how they relate to the child's choice of reading material.

The findings that interest patterns appear to be more influenced by sex than by I.Q. seemed to this investigator to point up the pertinency of Dewey's theory that "interest and self" are one and the same. Our society (at least up to the present!) has insisted upon a distinct and definite role for each of the two sexes. The developing child is encouraged to identify with the meaningful adult who represents his sex counterpart

and so builds a "self" through imitative adoption of the adult's interests expressed through activities.

Furthermore it seems that within the sex division which apparently is a primary one, interests correlate with mental age and growth of inner maturity; a fact which underlines again a possible synonymous relationship between "self and interests."

Assuming that "self and interest" are but two names for a single unity, the author theorized that it should be possible to devise an instrument that would discover the basic interests of the pupil and which could further be utilized for relevant information in regard to his reading. Since some children might be unable, and some unwilling to verbalize their preferences and others might feel impelled to give answers they considered adults wanted to hear, the writer felt that the instrument should not take the form of a questionnaire, oral conference, or inventory. Instead a projective technique was employed as the means by which individual interests would be assessed through manifestation.

The instrument devised consisted of 36 illustrations involving 12 categories of themes. These thematic groupings were designed to represent contrasting concepts. It was assumed that a student's selection of certain preferred illustrations would afford responses that could be considered expressions of his identifications with the major thematic content judged to be implicit to the picture.

Theme categories were:

1. Intellectual	____	2. Physical
3. Realistic	____	4. Fantastic
5. Adult	____	6. Peer
7. Outdoor	____	8. Indoor
9. Social	____	10. Individualistic
11. Masculine	____	12. Feminine

It was undertood that any one picture contained elements of several themes, but final determination of its classification depended on the predominant theme.

As a first step several hundred illustrations were collected by twenty-three teachers in eleven schools. Pupils were asked to find illustrations representing the various thematic categories. Theme classifications were re-phrased by the teachers to clarify the pupils' understanding. "Masculine," for example, was presented as "showing things boys and men do and like."

In addition, the investigator spent several weeks in collecting pictures to fit into the selected categories. The total aggregate of illustrations ~~were~~ was then subjected to intensive screening by three psychologists and thirty-six pictures selected - three to represent each of the twelve categories.

As a validating process on the value of the Thematic-Content Illustrations as an instrument to predict children's reading interests, the investigator originated a Thematic-Content Bibliography in which the twelve thematic categories of the picture test were again utilized. Fictitious title with equally fictitious summaries of forty-eight "books" were prepared to provide four "books" for each of the twelve theme

groupings. These forty-eight items were submitted to three different psychologists from the ones who had checked the illustrations for evaluation as to thematic content. As had been the case with the examination of the illustrations, the thematic assumptions of the investigator were not made evident to the psychologist examiners who were asked to determine thematic content in terms of the original twelve thematic groupings.

Once again, wherever the same theme or themes had been indicated by all three to be found in an item, it or they were considered to be the predominant or major ones.

To determine if the interests revealed by the Thematic-Content Illustrations instrument would be valid in terms of an actual reading situation, the one hundred seventh graders who participated in the study were given several opportunities to choose selections from The Literature Sampler* for independent silent reading.

The Sampler groups the stories at seven different reading levels and varies the levels within the same general theme areas. A student who selected a particular Preview because the topic interested him, but found reading it too difficult was thus able to find another selection within the same interest area suited to his reading ability.

Since the 100 pupils who participated in the project were all in the seventh grade, had intelligence ratings from low normal to very superior, and showed reading levels ranging from fifth to tenth grade on the Gates Reading Survey, Form 1, it was assumed that the reading material of The Sampler was within the range of their ability to read and comprehend.

---

* 1. Rita E. McLaughlin and Earl G. Eley, The Literature Sampler, Secondary Edition, (Chicago: Learning Materials, Inc., 1962).

Twenty-six classroom teachers were asked to read the selections from The Sampler and to classify them in terms of the twelve thematic categories previously utilized for both the illustrations and the bibliography. A consensus of the teachers' evaluations was then made, and the major thematic content of each selection determined on the basis of three or more agreements on any one theme. In evaluating the students' choices of reading material, thematic classifications were assigned in accordance with those determined by the teachers' evaluations.

To evaluate the effectiveness and validity of the Thematic-Content Illustrations as a means of determining individual interests and its application in the free selection of reading material, a comparison was made between the interests expressed through the student's choices of Thematic-Content Illustrations and the interests indicated by his selections of Thematic Bibliography items.

The original sample of children used to validate this interest finder consisted of 100 seventh grade pupils, fifty of whom were boys.

Of the 50 boys tested, 36 expressed major theme preferences through their illustration choices. Twenty-six of these 36, or 72%, expressed the same thematic preferences in their bibliography thematic preferences as they did in their illustrations.

Of the 50 girls tested, 34 expressed major theme preferences through their illustration choices. Twenty of these 34, or 59%, expressed the same thematic preferences in their bibliography thematic preferences as they did in their illustrations.

Of the 100 pupils tested, 70 expressed a major theme preference through their illustration choices and 46, or 66%, expressed the same thematic preferences in their bibliography thematic preferences as they did in their illustrations.

To ascertain whether or not the interests indicated by the illustrations chosen would be valid in terms of actual reading found "interesting" by the student, it was necessary to compare the interests revealed by use of the Thematic-Content Illustrations with the student's evaluations of selections they read.

Of the 36 boys previously reported as having expressed major thematic preferences through illustration choices, 25, or 69%, expressed the same thematic preferences in the choice and evaluation of what they read.

Of the 34 girls previously reported as having expressed major thematic preferences through illustration choices, 17, or 50%, expressed the same thematic preferences in the choice and evaluation of what they read.

Of the 70 pupils tested who had showed major theme preferences through their illustration choices, 42, or 60%, expressed the same thematic preferences in the choice and evaluation of what they read.

When the comparison was made between the combined major and minor preferences in themes through illustration choices with the bibliography thematic preference for all the children examined, it was found that 96 had made such illustration choices and 76 of these 96, or 78%, had similar bibliography choices.

Comparing combined major and minor preferences in themes through illustration choices with the choice and evaluation of what the children actually read it was found that 71 of the 96, or 74%, had made similar choices and evaluations of thematic material actually read.

From the study reported here, the following conclusions have been drawn and recommendations made:

1. The use of illustrations as thematic material for an indirect method of discovering and measuring interests of children gives abundant promise for further study.

2. Children as individuals vary as to their interest, the number of their interests and the level of intensity of their interests.
3. Analysis of a student's reading preferences should be undertaken in depth to ascertain as much as possible the significant effects of a writer's style, difficulty levels of material, and peer recommendations upon the assessment of a student's interest as shown by his free choice of particular illustrations. Such assessments should be made at periodic intervals, e.g., at 4th grade, 8th grade, 12th grade to determine whether any changes occur.
4. The thematic content of the illustrations was found more likely to be pluralistic than singular. Examination should be made of each illustration to list other possible content. Cross correlations between selections could in this way be discovered and the whole process of discovering interests and measuring their specific intensity refined to a more penetrating degree. (Such an examination is presently in progress.)
5. Color, size and/or the composition of an illustration was thought to have some influence on the student's response to the thematic content. (The illustrations have since been reduced to uniform size, printed in soft black on a white background, and each picture super-imposed on a black square.)

The instrument is presently being used by a number of Learning Disability Teacher Consultants in New Jersey and reports to date seem

to indicate it is proving helpful. Consideration is being given also to the idea of developing two forms; one for use at the elementary and one for the secondary or adult level.

REFERENCES

1. Amatora, S. M. and S. M. Edith. "Children's Interests in Free Reading," School and Society, LXIII (March 3, 1951), 134-137.

2. Dewey, John. Interest and Effort in Education, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), p. 90.

3. _____. Democracy and Education, (New York: The Macmillan Company, Paperbacks Edition, 1961), p.352.

4. Fryer, Douglas. The Measurement of Interests. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931).

5. Gesell, Arnold and Frances Ilg. Child Development; II. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949).

6. Harris, Chester W. (ed.). Encyclopedia of Educational Research. Third Edition. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960).

7. Stanchfield, Jo. M. "A Study of Boys' Reading Interests in Relation to Reading Achievement." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of California, Los Angeles, 1961.

8. Taylor, Marion W. and Mary A. Schneider. "What Books Are Our Children Reading," Chicago Schools Journal, XXXVIII (Jan. - Feb., 1957), 155-160.

9. Thorndike, Robert L. A Comparative Study of Children's Reading Interests. (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941).

10. Vandament, William E. and W. A. Thalman. "An Investigation Into the Reading Interests of Children," Journal of Educational Research, XLIX (February, 1956), 467-470.